DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 225 FL 023 445

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TITLE Good Video Movies for Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Bulletin of the International Cultural Research Institute of Chikushi Jogakuen College; n6 p105-125 Jul 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Communication; Classroom Techniques; *Communicative Competence (Languages); Cultural Context; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Evaluation Criteria; *Films; Foreign Countries; Instructional Materials; *Language Role; Language Usage; Learning Motivation; Listening Comprehension; *Media Selection; Second Language Instruction; Teacher Student Relationship; Videotape Recordings; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of movies for teaching English as a Second Language looks at some basic principles in using movies as instructional materials and discusses a number of issues in selecting materials and developing classroom instruction. It is argued that film communication offers links between classrooms and society, contains a wide range of vocabulary, can help explore cultural context, may be integrated easily into the curriculum, are entertaining, allow flexibility of materials and teaching techniques, can be related to students' personal experiences, act as a focus for teacher-student interaction, can be used to promote awareness of the interrelationship between modes (picture, movement, language, sound, captions), and should be used in their entirety. Movies can also be considered as a form of text. They are controllable teaching instruments, and offer great variety of subject, communicative language, language environment, and cultural content. Criteria for selecting films and techniques for using them in the classroom are discussed, drawing on related literature. Five criteria are proposed concerning film length, language quality, cultural aspects of theme, adaptability to communicative teaching methods, and potential for provoking thought and discussion. Contains 25 references. (MSE)

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Good Video Movies for Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language

David John Wood

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第6号
1995年7月

BULLETIN
of
THE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
of
CHIKUSHI JOGAKUEN COLLEGE
Number 6
July 1995

FL023445

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Introduction

As invited speaker at the 29th Annual Convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the largest language teaching society and convention in the world, the key issue raised by this current author was the issue of selection criteria in utilizing video movies in teaching English as a second or foreign language. The TESOL week began coincidentally with Oscar Night. Jubilant producers of *Forest Gump*, the film which swept most major honors in 1995, explained how "A good movie entertains, educates and empowers." This message is indisputable, both for the general viewing public as well as EFL/ESL teachers all over the world. But, *What is a good movie?* While suggestions abounded, there were no really clear justifications for them. Some even argue the question cannot be asked. Yet it is undeniable that teachers using them are asking as witness those I met at sessions. It is not simply a question of objective qualities and never political correctness, but movies were everywhere, on the way to, in and around the convention - with inflight new releases, hotel box office channels, and a special convention screening of *Heaven and Earth*. The novelist was the recipient of the TESOL 1995 President's Award, so that TESOL now gives its own "Oscars", too! Even if meaningful interpretation is more important than a checklist for choosing movies, simply ignoring the question on teachers' lips will not make it go away.

A Good Movie

My personal quest for confirming a definition of "A Good Movie" to teach English to speakers of other languages began in the exposition hall with the purchase of *102 Very Teachable Movies* by Mejia etc., (published by Prentice Hall Regents). After searching through every single page of the book, I found that none of the ten films advocated by this current author as a "Movie Top Ten for EFL/ESL" were listed. Twenty years of

video movie research seemed wiped in a twenty second browse. It was not without an ironic sense of relief that I found at the end of one of my presentations someone had kindly walked off with my copy, which I only made half-hearted attempts to recover. Several people enthusiastically mentioned the *Five Star Movies* series, but forcing students into the likes of Dances *With Wolves* after having been barely able to watch it to the end myself? That would be neither a good move nor a good movie.

"Exploiting Film and Literature" ((Pialorsi 1995)

Though literature is an expanding theme, it challenges a basic precept of an organization that uses the words "Speakers" and "Languages" in its name. While I had reservations about a talk featuring *The Great Gatsby*, another movie I never finished and one the speaker did not rate highly, our private discussion afterwards was fruitful. I was most interested in the potential of careful, detailed novel-versus-film comparisons in the Asian context where literature teaching often blots out attempts at genuine EFL in tertiary education - non-native teachers (who form both the largest and most influential EFL sector) showing films tend to just play them from start to finish without any significant analysis.

Discussion Sessions

Discussion Sessions give the opportunity to really specialize, and TESOL's Video Interest Section deserves credit for arranging so many. The two I was able to get to were interesting, and certainly helped compensate a little for all the other talks it was impossible to attend. While neither quite matched their handbook abstracts, both stimulated discussion and thus fulfilled the basic session goal. "Learning Through Delight" (Ogden 1995) split attenders into groups for idea sharing, and while there was no time for more than a couple to report back their individual discussions, the experience was still better than the standard one-way TESOL talk. "Video and Literature" (Hambrook 1995) took participants to the heady heights of Shakespeare animations from the European perspective of the set text. We also considered the faithfulness of such novel adaptations as *Great Expectations*. Although there was relevance to non-native teachers, as there were none in attendance (a weakness of TESOL as they are 99% responsible for EFL and the largest research section), it would be better to consider video's potentials for pre-literate students - or instead rename TESOL TEROL or "Teachers of English to Readers of Other Literatures".

"Teaching With Video"

In "Teaching With Video", my first session, attended by 60 people, questions from participants covered such issues as suitable film titles for high school and elementary levels; copyright restrictions; how to use video when students resist learning; and, authentic video materials in general. (A list of titles is included at the end without specific reservations as I don't know and haven't used them all.) Copyright issues have been treated elsewhere. The general consensus was, if you have a legal copy of a film and do not use it for commercial purposes, that is fair use. It was felt U.S. films' emulative attractiveness broke down resistance.

"Film Communication"

In my next session, I outlined the principles of Film Communication, which is facilitated by the power of feature film and advent of video. The latter brings the necessary control to such a movingly communicative medium, plus the dramatic expansion of the movie-viewing environment to homes, schools, libraries, etc. The spread of video films is stimulated by the internationalizing of movie companies and subsequent rechanneling of their productions (along with support materials) in response to the committed grassroots interest of English teachers and students alike, within the context of a worldwide EFL/ESL market. While it can extend to student production, for large classes where decks are more common than cameras, the creativity may be spoken rather than filmed.

Principles of TEFL Film Communication

(i) Communication-environment Continuity

Film communication offers links between classrooms and society, engaging students in video-movie self study at home, and encouraging general interest in the world of film via news items, cinema visits and topics of conversation with people they meet. The wide range of subjects that movies treat can also prompt students to research for themselves areas of interest in which they have weak or little background knowledge, further generating communication possibilities with people of other nationalities - writing penpals, meeting travelers and so on. In this way, their interest will extend through time, by picking up any interest in movies they may have had before starting such a course of study, as well as sustaining an active involvement in learning English through movies in later life.

(ii) Comprehensive Target Language

While the language in the video itself should not be allowed to dominate a class's study goals, it is still important, and all its most useful, transferable and potentially productive elements should be sought out and channeled into interesting, meaningful and communicative activities. It has been estimated that it can take as few as 600 different words to understand as much as 80% of almost any movie (Belew, *Key to Unlocking Movies and Videos*, ECS Japan, 1994). With the total number of different words in a movie ranging anywhere from 5,000 up to as many as 20,000, only around 10% of them or less appear therefore to be communicatively essential. Such a low figure suggests that there is a lot of scope left for activities that use other language, not necessary to the study of a movie as mere tapescript, but vital to all the different kinds of spin-off language activities that can be creatively generated by watching and reacting.

(iii) Cultural Transparency

While no movie is free from some cultural translucency, which may interfere with students' understanding, examples that are opaquely inward-looking, and lack any relevance to those outside a fixed sociological group, may be less effective with EFL students than those achieving enough transparency. The problem may lie not only in the film, but also the treatment. If a teacher can find those points of connection most worthwhile to his or her particular students, the level of transparency does not have to be so high. The universality and depth of human experience of a film are also key criteria. Domination by US films is a problem, but producers so far have only allowed hit movies to be developed for EFL/ESL.

(iv) Curricular Integration

Video movies command too much attention to qualify as supplements to a curriculum, but they can still coexist and interweave with other concurrent pedagogical agendas. Their claim to authenticity should be respected by teachers and students, and at the same time, student discernment between the merely emotive and the genuinely valuable should be nurtured.

(v) Enjoyment of Understanding to Deepen the Viewing Experience

Entertainment is not something to avoid, but the enjoyment that students derive from becoming able to understand something no matter how small (a word, a line, a

feeling) from a film should be a high goal as it will lead to the deeper satisfaction of understanding a film better, even when students may already think they already know the movie in question well enough. In order not to frustrate the normal sense of expectation that anyone, student or otherwise, will come to a film with, the instructor should clarify this aim from the outset, and assess as often as possible en route how in fact students feel they are or are not deriving pleasure from their attempts to learn both language and emotions that they may not have known before starting their course.

(vi) Flexible Materials and Techniques Development

Because of the lack of consistent material development caused by such problems as copyright, there is a danger that those materials that do appear may be narrow in their technique range. It is important to stress flexibility of materials and techniques design. A good choice means that most teachers coming to such resources will find something that can work for them under the particular conditions they find they have to teach. At the same time, especially for instructors who are busy or inexperienced in using video at all, detailed and coherent teaching suggestions and explanations are also needed.

(vii) Interest-generating Personalization

An important principle is to help students make connections between their own situations and what they are viewing. This could be personal (seeing a link between the cultural sensibility of the characters in the film and their own culture) or a direct inroad into their own immediate situation. Even hypothetical personalization (students putting themselves in the position of a character, to imagine what they would do and how they would feel) is an authentic line of study, and may indeed be the highest level of interactivity.

(viii) Student/Teacher Interaction

Whether in relation to selection or technique, the real communication must occur between teachers and students, and between the students themselves. With video movies as one of many possible foci for such interaction, this three-way process should be continually shaping all its participants.

(ix) Target-mode Balance

One-track activities (like listening-comprehension-only strategies) fail to exploit video movies' multi-modal potential. Not only should activities achieve target mode

balance (picture, movement, language, sound and captions) but they should include techniques that actively involve students in building an awareness of the interplay that can exist between the different modes.

(x) Whole Movie Approach

Well chosen scenes from different movies can be interesting and serve a limited purpose, but to emphasize communication, the complete process of a movie is in order as the vehicle for study. Avoiding obsessive word-by-word study approaches and training students' gist understanding via key conversations instead produce chances for language development in every skill direction.

"Movies as Texts"

My final presentation was "Movies as Texts". After discussing the background to materials writing for video movies, a detailed example of scene preparation was offered. A free discussion followed on the perpetual issue of: What is a good movie and why? Physical properties of movies once obstructed their potential as texts. They could not be enjoyed: at an individual speed; alone, with friends only or in a normal class; or, as often as you liked unless you owned a cinema and were continually rerunning the movie in question. Then came video plus a TV explosion in movie broadcasting. Now video movies rival texts with their: viewing mode control; repeated viewing capability; and, capacity to be viewed by oneself, with groups of one's own choosing, or in many class situations.

Video as Text

Of course, while video movies can thus assume book-like qualities, they reveal a very different kind of text as they: are principally visual and dynamic; have dialogue and sound effects; and, if captioned, show written language like a script. They can be experienced in whole or excerpted into scenes like book chapters. This final presentation showed a few ways movies could be exploited as texts for teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. All the logistics involved in making movies available as texts were too involved for this overview, but are detailed in this current author's *Film Communication in EFL* (New York: Mellen). The main considerations included rationale, selection criteria, and so on. These were discussed before giving a detailed example of how to develop a movie as a text, featuring an all purpose technique overlay, prior to closing questions and discussion.

The concept of video as text is already established. From 1990, for example, U.S.A. state education boards like Texas officially adopted video in place of traditional text-based curricula. Of course, this is not to say that the conventional written text will disappear, or that other kinds of text are impossible, but in an age of visual technology, an age where media are the message, language teachers planning curricula need at least to acknowledge that video can help them focus student attention more powerfully than other texts. We stand to gain as much as anyone from the employment of video.

Why Video Movies

In proposing them as an educational medium, it is first necessary to address the question: Why video movies? Without going into a full-length article, we might just say that the immense potential range of subject, language, communicative situation, imagination and culture that movies offer cannot be matched by any other raw communicative materials, at least in the EFL context of Asia. Yet the most intangible and arguably most vital element of a language stimulus is the ability to affect its user. This is not to say that video possesses such a quality automatically, but that careful selection (plus adequate support-material development) can create the possibility both for students to learn the language and to be inspired at the same time. Ideally, the inspiration that video can generate tends to promote not only language learning, but acquisition of insights previously unfelt and not understood.

As for the development of TEFL, what can video do to help? In the context of Japan, I answered in my rationale for JALT's Video Special Interest Group:

> Video has vast potential for enriching language study and making it more enjoyable and effective. Researching how best to choose from and use the mountain of available materials is (our) primary goal. Video offers both a multilingual and a multicultural oasis, in what is essentially an otherwise monolingual and monocultural society. Its methodology extends across all disciplines involving areas of instruction, teacher training and research.

Video's Controllability and Motivational Strength

The kinds of general problem confronting the EFL teacher are helped by video when there is limited contact with native speakers. Even in ESL situations, however, where such contacts may be much easier to come by, video's controllability and motivational strength are of much benefit. Movies cannot solve every problem, but they

play a big part in language acquisition for both EFL and ESL students. The sense of achievement gained from understanding even a short scene is important, especially in environments where the kind of English in use does not exist communicatively, and thus lacks spontaneity.

Three Communication Modes

While video movies may be just fiction dressed in reality, and should therefore not be mistaken for life, they offer a linguistically valuable alternative to living in a full-time English environment. They make it easier to imagine the context of living English than printed text, pictures or audio tape alone can, because of their dynamic potential fusion of three distinct but intertwining communication modes – the vocal, visual and verbal. More than other EFL texts, video-movies both seek out the new with tireless persistence, at the same time as possessing a timeless value that rivals literature. The maturing rewatchability of the best films makes them a pleasure to study repeatedly and in ever greater depth.

Subject Range

The subject range that movies offer makes almost any selection of life or human imagination accessible. Despite feature film's ultimately fictive nature, in the context of the interest that they generate and the follow-up research on the themes that they raise, film can be part of the process of leading students to a discernment of cultural reality. Naturally, not every title is suitable for use in every class, but allowing students some degree of independent choice is important. In some cases, a class's suggestions may even turn the instructor's attention to material with excellent potential of which he or she was previously unaware.

Communicative Language Range

Studies of the communicative language range of movies as opposed to video made specifically for English language teaching indicate that the spread of linguistic levels is wider in the former (movies) in contrast with only the very beginner and most advanced levels of the latter. Movies contain a broad spectrum of diction appropriate to a wide variety of social situations. In terms of their sound quality and acoustic range, video offers more than just audio, which oversimplifies sound effects to make them comprehensible. Film's visual reinforcement increases comprehensible language input and the whole realm of hearing, raising a viewer's sense of linguistic and paralinguistic

authenticity. In terms of video's hidden language, this factor can be a great stimulus for language generation.

Language Environment

The range of language environment is also extended by the study of video movies, and not just physically in terms of location, which can reach the home and society in general in a number of ways, creating a social link with English speakers. Students who learn the necessary strategies to comprehend whole movies, or simply scenes to begin with, can apply them to their future viewing beyond the time limits of the school term or semester. Of course, the most diligent student, even after completing all of his or her courses, may make the effort to search out new printed EFL texts for self study, but the sheer availability of video movies, plus their greater attractiveness and appeal, seem likely to carry any interest in them created by their study in class beyond conventional texts.

Cultural Aspects

The cultural aspects of video movies present nearly every convention imaginable. Video movies can display countless examples of problematical behavior, conflicts and crunes, private lifestyles and casual speech. Such authentic experiences on which students can draw are almost impossible to convey in class settings under normal conditions by other means. While this may be dismissed as mere vicarious pseudo-experience, in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in particular, where few other realistic alternatives may exist, video movies can be the next best thing to reality, and cheaper, more utillzable and more flexible than buying experience in the form of homestays or trips abroad. They can also lower the anxiety level of shier students.

Film Selection Criteria

Many authorities have already written about video selection criteria. This section integrates representative opinions from: those empirically drawing conclusions; researchers scientifically extracting what they see as appropriate; commercial producers defending their wares; other producers applying broader criteria to their judgment; and, finally, students who undergo video classes and reflect on the true value of the experience. While considerations such as sales strategies also have a strong effect on which movies can be finally developed aboveboard for language teaching, it is still vital

that all those mentioned so far have their views taken into account so that the materials which do become publicly available are not the monopoly of any one single group.

In the authentic versus non-authentic video debate, both sides readily agree on video's teaching value, but their evaluations of what kind of video is most suitable seem polarized. One of the best known producers of non-authentic video (Viney 1990) adopts the position that authentic videos should be avoided naturally by EFL teachers because preparation time is excessive, materials are nearly always too long, they only work with advanced students, there is likely to be a perception gap between teacher and student regarding the popularity of the material, and, he asserts, showing authentic videos is often illegal.

Ironically, the same producer not only chose a director of authentic programs to guide his "non-authentic" video series, but also incorporated many features of authentic video throughout. This is symptomatic of recent trends amongst ELT video producers, who react to teachers' wishes by customizing and packaging materials originally designed for native viewers. The question of how to define authentic and non-authentic video, therefore, remains very much in the balance.

Proponents of authentic video point first to the lack of authentic speech models in ELT videos – even with beginners who need slow and clear language, it is important to expose them to non-teacher native language samples from the earliest stages, which authentic video can help with. Authentic videotaped speech samples in the most absolute sense can only be derived by secretly filming conversations, as the known presence of a camera will likely influence any situation. However, as completely authentic interchanges may defy outsiders' comprehension, semi-authentic movie interactions are potentially the best alternative, being "powerful attention-getters providing a natural focus for topic interest and dramatic progression" (Natusch 1990). The goal of most movies, after all, is to convince viewers of their authenticity.

In one critique of authentic video (Strange 1987) several areas that have a bearing on selection are discussed. These can be itemized in question form as follows:

(i) *Do aural and visual elements support or conflict with each other?*

(ii) *Does on-screen movement supplement or confuse overall meaning?*

(iii) *Does the video's ideological basis enhance or detract from language learning?*

(iv) *Is the visual or linguistic density assimilable or overloading?*

and

(v) *Is the video able to activate students or will it make them passive?*

To qualify these concerns, various research articles can be referred to. Especially with beginner level students of a language, it appears that when an aural/visual mismatch occurs, students default to the visual mode and linguistic processing ceases (Fisher 1984). As authentic materials were designed for native speakers, who are not expected to encounter such problems, the relationship between sound and picture needs careful consideration in related material design. Similarly, although on-screen movement may appear to be one of video's most attractive features, the distraction it causes when materials are inexpertly selected or inadequately designed can detract from their linguistic value. Furthermore, paralinguistic aspects, such as body movement, if not particularly clear, may be too incomplete to allow a significant learning experience.

Good movies will achieve a high sense of authenticity in their own terms, but should never be confused with any absolute reality. The director may wish to convey a strong ideological standpoint which he or she hopes to persuade viewers to accept, or at least consider very seriously. This factor can only be beneficially utilized in teaching English as a foreign language provided both support materials and instructors take the time to allow for thought and discussion. It follows that, even at beginner level, students should attempt to express basic agreement or disagreement with the attitudes that a movie presents. They should be encouraged to distinguish in general between objective information and emotive dramatization, as well as, at the level of the single utterance, between tonal sincerity and irony.

Many authentic videos are visually and linguistically dense. Not only are they designed for native listeners who can assimilate much more in a single stretch than the foreign language learner, but they may contain a lot of information that is not all necessary for viewers to take in, as they will be able to cope with a high degree of redundancy. For instructors in the field of film communication, this implies that, not only should the materials chosen be looked at carefully for their content density, but also that the amount to be shown at any one time needs careful consideration and planning. Students' assimilation strategies need monitoring to ensure that they are targeting, at least initially, only that information which is essential to their global comprehension. Showing segments more than once is often necessary, but only by varying the aim and nature of each showing will the instructor be able to ensure that student attention is sustained.

Perhaps most important of all among these questions is that of activating a class. There is a risk of a concept clash in expecting students to use a movie for something

other than passive entertainment. This point should be the first to address with any class starting a film communication course. Raising awareness about how much is actually going on in a film, and discussing the need for active participation in students' viewing to promote language learning, are perhaps the most fundamental prerequisites. Entertainment, although not the primary goal any more, is still an important part of a film-communication course, as it motivates a class to look at learning a language as an energetic but still enjoyable task. In the same way, the instructor committing him or herself to this style of teaching must invest the necessary care to select teaching strategies that involve students at all points in generating positive linguistic feedback.

While non-authentic video language that is well designed will be in good balance with the visual elements accompanying it, and have little or no redundancy, students may be left with having to make a quantum leap to reach reality if they are led to assume that they will not be confronted by redundancy (and much more) even the first time that their foreign language skills are put to the test in the real world. Similarly, although authentic instructional programs possess an equally supportive audio-visual match, the range of situations they cover is insufficient to prepare students for many actual communicative needs. Movies seem comparatively unlimited in their range.

Yet, despite being not only the language "text" of choice for student and instructor alike, video motion pictures are not fairly reflected in current research. Three major studies in the early 1990s on video and technology in language teaching barely give video movies a mention (*Cross Currents* 1992, *The Language Teacher* and *TESOL Journal*, both 1993). The last of these even asserts ". . . feature films (like drama) have also failed to be useful as language learning resources" (Vanderplank in *TESOL Journal* 1993). It is also disappointing to read that the same group of researchers do not recognize any potential for language learning beyond the school and learner's home environments (Murison-Bowie in *TESOL Journal* 1993) despite the obvious efforts and progress of so many students who are regular cinemagoers, travel abroad and try talking to English speakers wherever they may meet them.

Such refusals to acknowledge powerful grassroots evidence can only be compensated for by looking closely at what teachers have to say about selecting and using video movies in foreign-language teaching. While opinions differ vastly about the points they identify, the areas of major concern can be divided into the following:

(i) a movie's popularity and content;

(ii) the length of segment and viewing goal;

(iii) the language and action that it contains; and

(iv) the kind of techniques that can be employed with it

Some educators stress most the teacher's enthusiasm for a title (Ricketts 1991), asserting that it will naturally motivate a class. Others (Morley 1981) hold that relevance to students' lives and lifestyles should determine the choice of movie, as without this face validity, a class is neither motivated nor attentive. While Kusuya (1993) sees potential danger in using films that have been successful and some even insist on using only works completely unknown to students, there are those who see familiarity as a boon (Seal and Bean 1991). Without specifying objective terms, Goette (1992) stresses rich, stimulating content, and Ferasci and Someya (1989), in pointing to the generation taste gap between instructors and classes, see genre as largely determinative in selection. Kusuya supports the genre line for selection, at the same time as favoring content that invites cultural contrast. Finally, Allen (1986) leans towards the communicative urgency of content as the paramount factor.

The length factor in selection is also unresolved. While Willis (1983) and Stempleski (1990) agree on a minimum of thirty seconds, which is about as short as one could possibly conceive, McKnight (1986) favors up to forty minutes and Stoller two hours, which just about covers the complete showing time of any regular film. While Stoller is not alone in suggesting straight-through showing (Ferasci and Someya would hasten complete viewing with film summaries), most instructors seem to favor short, self-contained scenes around five to ten minutes, echoing Lonergan's misgivings about length.

Walsh (1992) proposes short individual scenes from different movies to be viewed independently of the whole film for focusing on the study of language functions. This is also a goal pursued by Natusch for building sets of examples of how to express the same thing in a wide variety of situations. Allen suggests whole movies with themes appropriate to content-based curricula, while Macdonald (1990) only indicates that a movie satisfy the teacher's goals, and Goette asserts it should constitute a suitable subject. Kitao perhaps offers the best compromise by merely stipulating that the content should be interesting and divisible into short segments of the optimum length mentioned above.

Language issues provoke the largest consensus gaps. Goette insists that, along with subject suitability, linguistic clarity is the only other essential criterion. Macdonald emphasizes that the language of a film (plus cultural content) should be accessible to

the target class. Seal and Bean advise against films with improper/non-standard language, recommending movies high in action and low on words. They reduce possible choices drastically by simultaneously proposing contemporary films, which (apart perhaps from Disney!) do not seem to be set on any clear course away from authentic vocabulary and accent .

It should also be pointed out that first-language teaching includes non-standard English and that non-standard language components form a part of courses for EFL teachers and foreign-language teaching abroad. There is a body of opinion amongst teachers that represents a more realistic counterbalancing. Stempleski downplays language as a primary factor in favor of techniques that make authentic video usable with students even at lower levels of ability. Kitao okays non-standard language, preferring a good balance between the language and action. Nonetheless, Macdonald's caveat that language which frustrates students is counterproductive, and Goette's acid test (for teachers to transcribe scenes using audio elements only and see if they are verbally comprehensible) are still points worth considering in selection wherever practical.

In terms of the kinds of technique that can be used with video movies, Stempleski offers general advice. Especially for teachers looking to use a number of scenes or movies, in considering which to select, economy of preparation time may become a major factor in materials development. Thus, expending inordinate amounts of energy to develop an elaborate activity that can only be used once could be a wasted investment. Techniques that are purposefully recyclable - that is, they can be applied on various occasions with a number of different scenes - will be most expedient. Looking at preparation from a different angle, scenes that invite a number of possible applications (for example, for use with students of different ability levels) will also be the most time-effective for teachers with busy schedules in or out of school.

One sustained discussion on selection criteria for movies in EFL (Arcario 1993) reflects the indecisiveness of the views presented above by being as non-committal as possible. Echoing Stempleski, he leaves the choice up to the particular activity a teacher has in mind, throwing the real question of which movie to select back into the open forum. The aim, he asserts, is not to limit selection by adhering strictly to hard and fast rules, but rather to conduct individual experimentation, so a teacher can find what suits his or her needs best. In distinguishing between two general linguistic goals - the pursuit of language in the video, and that of language which can be generated by the video - Arcario constructs two loose sets of criteria. The first of these would

include: the degree of visual support; clarity of sound and picture; density of language; speech delivery; language content; and, language level. The second set can also apply to selecting video where the language presented is the focus: interest; appropriateness of content; length; independence of sequence; and, availability of related materials. While the criteria do not add anything dramatically new to those mentioned before, they provide a convenient overview of most of the salient points involved in selection.

Turning to the producers of feature films, the evaluation criteria employed by Columbia/Sony Pictures Entertainment seem comprehensive enough, but in fact they are unfortunately limited to what Arcario defined as the pursuit of the language in a video only. Their criteria are also strongly influenced by the original self-study instruction kit approach, and not really designed for classroom application. Nonetheless, the selection process they employ has been a major determining factor in their authorization of titles for release in curriculum marketing and therefore needs to be examined.

The actual evaluation is divided into ten sections: dialogue speed; articulation and accent; regional dialect; specific dialect; inappropriate language; business language; style and social class of expression; potential audience; type of English; and, recommendations. As at least eight out of the ten categories are video language specific, it is clear that the evaluation is virtually completely based on the assumption that the film is only to be studied word by word as a printed text, with the visual aspect and its potential for generating language, to all extents and purposes, largely ignored. The one category that seems unrelated to narrow linguistic considerations, that of intended viewer, is stereotypically divided into: young male; young female; businessman; and high school. This probably tells us more about Japanese society than it does about whether a film could appeal or be relevant to students or not.

The author has tried persistently over the last five years to explain the problems involved with selection to SPE with only a small degree of success - three titles that were once selected by them, but which were clearly not the most suited to TEFL, were canceled. However, persuading SPE to accept titles that fail their rigid language-only test has been impossible. Nonetheless, two titles I strongly recommended were at least allowed into the self-instruction kit library, and it is to be hoped that continuing negotiations will yield more progress. An example of the attempts made so far follows, and more will be said about actual titles later on:

> . . . I must stress that (some titles which you have chosen) will benefit no one involved in the school curriculum plan. I would not challenge your company's appraisals, but they seem

> to be challenging nearly every (EFL) teacher and student I have met during the last twenty years with respect to what constitutes worthy study material. If students cannot relate (to a movie), or find nothing of true spiritual value therein, no matter how superficially sound the mechanics of the language in which they are expressed may appear, such materials will be hollow and meaningless. Students will turn off their hearts and minds to them, regardless of the quality of the technique, or of the teaching which is employed. I would not want this project to fizzle into extinction because of poor selection, even if the same titles might be okay for self study.
>
> (Wood, Unpublished letter, 1992)

Student opinions on selection criteria can be collected by asking for regular feedback, especially after a class has finished studying one movie. Reactions are as diverse as the number of students in a class, and are not possible to summarize neatly. However, some points are recurrent and can be itemized here. In terms of the language in a movie, students do not necessarily feel difficult or fast dialogue is better avoided. In terms of a video's language, students only specify that they need time to rewatch. One criteria, then, is that a film should be interesting enough to watch many times. In fact, students do not object to slang, but say instead that a movie should give them a sense of being exposed to native-like language in a wide range of realistic situations. Regardless of the difficulty, they are motivated by a wish to be able to listen to and understand actual conversations, which movies can simulate well in their perception.

That a film is interesting, however, is not the final measure. Students place the highest value on whether a film is dramatically powerful enough to move them or not. The need for emotive response ultimately subordinates even the quality of techniques. Obviously, though, to derive full benefit from a good film, technique is important. In this context, students often use the word "enjoy" not in the sense of having fun, but of experiencing a sense of spiritual satisfaction through viewing. Their primary consideration is that a movie must absorb their interest. Students still specify, though, that good techniques can make or break the opportunity to extract maximum benefit.

Students also specify that their ideal movie should involve them not in a passive role as mere recipients of powerful emotions, but actively by provoking them into both thinking about the movie and themselves in the light of their viewing experience. This productive requirement involves the need to express in the target language both what one has felt about the viewing content, as well as about the personal implications for the viewer, who should be inspired to review his or her own situation as a result.

Some of the actual titles that students often cite as satisfying their selection criteria

will be mentioned later. At this point, though, some general comments about the kind of films which they tend to select can be made. While students often include one or two of the most popular current titles, certain titles recur every year. It may be therefore better to refrain from adopting the view that the most recent titles genuinely satisfy student selection criteria until subsequent feedback confirms that such choices are not just passing fancies.

While the view that selection should take into account the apparent desire for characters of about the same age as students with similar interests (Morley's face validity), in fact, the titles most often chosen do not always feature such characters. As often as not, it is less the similarity between student and character that determines their choice than the empathy that they can achieve. Accordingly, students are stimulated by good titles to consider how they would feel in the same situation as a character, regardless of age, sex or situation.

Selection criteria include at least 5 overlapping points that affect each other:

(i) segmental length must be assimilable but cumulative length can be free;

(ii) authentically convincing/communicatively transferable language is needed;

(iii) theme should be culturally transparent retcatchable and widely relevant;

(iv) length language and theme adaptable to communicative methodology and sufficiently flexible to serve the ability levels/needs of various learners are best;

(v) titles both acceptable to instructor/class alike and likely to engage students in expressing their reactions in English are essential

Most movie scenes fall naturally into the 5-10 minute range. Those that do not are either short enough to be paired with a preceding or subsequent segment. Others that are very long likely contain natural breaks or are suitable for activities where scenes can be watched in two or more sections. More important than exactly how many minutes a scene lasts, however, is the notion of "self-contained". By definition, a scene is only one part of the self-contained unit that a movie comprises. While it is possible to tell students to watch the movie by themselves, watching only a single scene from a movie in class is liable to be an unsatisfying experience. Justifying excision and out-of-context display of one-off scenes on linguistic grounds threatens a video-only language imbalance, stifling full production of all the language that a movie can profitably generate. People naturally look for and expect whole units of meaning.

Ultimately, a movie's language is only as important as a teacher makes it.

Linguistic clarity is a consideration, but without the meaningful linguistic reality that students seek, the result is like studying scenes instead of movies - dissatisfaction. Good visual/verbal balance and on-screen movement supporting the dialogue can help. Most movies usually contain scenes where this is an integral principle.

Good movies are also usually diverse enough to contain scenes where the movie language only is worthy of focused study, or the visual element capable of generating enough student language to make dialogue subordinate. Movement-induced visual defaults can be as linguistically valuable as clear dialogue and zero movement. If a movie contains instances of both (which good ones surely will), opportunities for raising student interest may be unlimited.

Where a movie's theme is too bound up with a single culture only, the learning emphasis may shift from language in a meaningful context. Themes bridging cultural barriers, on the other hand, will not only be naturally applicable to a wider EFL audience, but also generate more communicative opportunities for students familiar with subjects that can be focal points for contact with many nationalities. It is impossible to categorize such themes - if it were, then no more movies could be made. Perhaps a relevant development in movies made in the U.S.A. is that of looking beyond their own shores to diverse international themes as the cinemagoing and video-movie market expands globally.

Language, theme and length rely on valid communicative teaching techniques for the exploitation of their worth. If these factors prove adaptable, then one main criterion is met. Students must be presented with movies: in segments that are short enough for them to assimilate; that contain language transferable to their communicative needs; and, whose themes are durable and rewatchable enough for the intensive and extensive study activities that a communicative curriculum offers. Thus a functional approach is possible to an extent, but it must not be limited to functions that only occur in the language of the movie alone. Equally important are the functions that apply to the language which students need to talk about a film. Non-standard language is an acceptable part of content, but it should only be taught (if at all) for recognition and not production.

Good techniques are those which best help students to express themselves. Personal expression will extend to movie viewing, both in terms of a movie's actual content and the relationship between such content and students' own lives. Good techniques will activate students by transferring communicative urgency to their own situations. Finally, good activities will not be restricted by video language levels or

speeds. Techniques must stress flexibility and create various applications for different levels of students. They will be reusable with different scenes and different movies, but they should not be repetitive. They will facilitate students' communicative ability not just in linguistic terms, but also in tonal identification decoding paralinguistic cues such as body language.

The last but perhaps most important factor in movie selection involves identifying titles which satisfy a consensus of opinion as representing the most significant and affective stories available. Teachers must take into account their own taste, but should look carefully both at the tastes of other teachers and the recurrent tastes of their students. However, data presented by genre indicates little agreement between teachers' and students' choices.

Titles advocated by movie companies for study are rarely recommended by any other source, whether it be teacher or student. I was finally able to dissuade the producers from proceeding with their first choices after years of explanation. While titles we eventually compromised on satisfied most of the criteria for selection, the best titles are still awaiting development, despite having received wide approval from teachers and researchers. The copyright owners' narrow film-language-only test, actually designed for self-study purposes, risks failing to take into consideration the language-generating potential of a movie.

An example is *Stand by me*. According to the official evaluation, the movie only fails 1 out of their 8 language-specific categories. The final category, which summarizes overall impression, is very revealing. It admits that the story is "interesting and easily understood", the speech clear and not too fast and, most important, that it is very popular with young audiences. The evaluation then concludes that the movie is irreversibly flawed because of its inappropriate use of slang and swearing which, it affirms, is "not very useful language to learn."

This shows a perception gap between producer and EFL consumer, as the former assumes film study in EFL means just learning every word of dialogue by rote. However, such a concept is anathema to communicative curricula, as only the most suitable examples of language in a film should ever be taught for production, accounting for as little as 10% or even less of total dialogue. My frequent attempts to explain have so far only resulted in the inclusion of *Stand by me* amongst self-study titles, but I cite it in the hope it becomes available.

Titles Recommended at TESOL 95 (Starred items are student choices)

Amazing Stories **Back to the Future* *Bambi* *Beethoven*

Big Foot and the Hendersons *Charlie* *Dances With Wolves*

El Norte *ET* *Fiddler on the Roof* *The Great Gatsby*

Great Expectations *Groundhog Day* *Hamlet*

Homeward Bound *The Hunt for Red October* *Kes*

**Kramer vs Kramer* *One Flew Over the Cuckoos' Nest*

**Room With a View* *Scrooge* *The Secret Garden*

Stand and Deliver **Stand by me* *Storm Boy* *White Fang*

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